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Advancement of women

Improvement of the situation of women in rural areas

Report of the Secretary-General**

I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 54/135 of 17 December 1999, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General, in cooperation with the relevant international organizations, specialized agencies, funds and programmes, and in consultation with Member States, to prepare a comprehensive report on the situation of rural women and challenges faced by them, based, inter alia, on the outcome of an expert group meeting, which would draw from the contributions and case studies provided by experts from various regions and to submit it to the Assembly at its fifty-sixth session.

2. In pursuance of the request of the General Assembly, the Division for the Advancement of Women of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations Secretariat, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and in consultation with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), convened an expert group meeting on the situation of rural women in the context of globalization, which was hosted by the Government of Mongolia at Ulaanbaatar, from 4 to 8 June 2001. The experts examined the impact on rural women of major global economic trends, such as the growth in rural non-farm economic activities, the liberalization of trade and markets for agricultural products, the commercialization of agriculture, the rapid diffusion of products, technologies and information and changing consumption patterns. They proposed a research and policy agenda which would maximize the beneficial effects of globalization for women in the context of ongoing social and economic change in rural areas.

3. The recommendations of the expert group meeting were directed to Governments, the United Nations system, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, the private sector and civil society. The experts expanded the agenda of action to be taken at both the international and national levels, as outlined in the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women[1] and in the outcome document adopted by the General Assembly at its twenty-third special session (see resolution S-23/3, annex).

4. Issues relating to the situation of rural women were considered in the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women,[2] throughout the Beijing Declaration[3] and Platform for Action, and in the above-mentioned outcome document on further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The emphasis was on the equal access of rural women to productive resources, such as land, capital, credit and technology, and to gainful employment, the decision-making process, education and health services. The Platform

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for Action also emphasized the need for the formulation and implementation of policies and programmes that enhance the situation of women producers in rural areas, increase their incomes and promote household food security.

5. The outcome document emphasized that there were still too many rural women working in the informal economy with low levels of income and little job and social security. These women also often had no rights to own land, even through right of inheritance. It further outlined microcredit and other financial instruments as successful strategies for the economic empowerment of women living in poverty, in particular in rural areas.

6. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (see General Assembly resolution 34/180) obliges State parties to take into account the particular problems faced by rural women and the significant roles that rural women play in the economic survival of their families, including their work in the non-monetized sectors of the economy, and to ensure the application of the Convention to women in rural areas (art. 14).

7. In addition, in resolutions 2000/13 of 17 April 2000[4] and 2001/34 of 23 April 2001,[5] the Commission on Human Rights focused specifically on the right of women to equal ownership of, access to and control over land and their equal right to own property and to adequate housing. By these resolutions, the Commission reaffirmed prior commitments and objectives contained in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, resolutions 1997/19 of 27 August 1997, 1998/15 of 21 August 1998 and 1999/15 of 25 August 1999 of the Subcommission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights[6] and Commission on the Status of Women resolution 42/1 of 13 March 1998.[7]

8. The present report takes into account the findings and recommendations contained in all of the above-mentioned documents, as well as previous reports of the Secretary-General on the situation of rural women (A/40/239 and Add.1, A/44/516, A/48/187, A/50/257/Rev.1, A/52/326, and A/54/123). The report also examines the impact of global trends and their policy implications as regards the situation of rural women, and provides policy recommendations that are aimed at maximizing the beneficial effects of globalization for rural women while curtailing those effects that are harmful. The report is based on the analysis and conclusions of the above-mentioned expert group meeting case studies and contributions provided by experts from various regions and representatives of United Nations entities, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, FAO and the World Bank, as well as literature on the subject.

9. The conceptual framework for analysing the situation of rural women in the context of globalization is identified in section II below. In sections III and IV, the report focuses on the changes in livelihood patterns and the changing patterns of labour mobility, respectively. Section V contains an analysis of household dynamics in terms of the structure of households, household division of labour, gender relations and decision-making processes. Conclusions and recommendations are contained in section VI.

II. Conceptual framework for analysing the situation of rural women in the context of globalization

10. Globalization is a multifaceted phenomenon inclusive of trade liberalization, greater mobility of capital and increased financial flows, changes in labour demand, liberalization of labour markets and their growing flexibility,* changes in the process of production, changes in the role and function of the State, rapid diffusion of products and consumption patterns, more rapid diffusion of information and technology, new forms of governance and mechanisms of regulation, and the emergence of a global civil society.

11. Rural development, in the context of globalization, is affected by intensified commercialization and industrialization of agriculture, the growing economic and political influence of multinational corporations, the expansion of agribusiness and the emergence of global commodity chains. Increasing privatization of resources and services, liberalization of trade and markets for food and other agricultural products, intensification of international and internal labour movements and wider

* That is, a reduction in stable, permanent work and an increase in temporary and flexible work.

use of information and communication technologies are among the other factors that affect rural communities in the context of globalization.

12. The commercialization of agriculture has been one of the most significant factors in the transformation of the rural and agricultural sectors. With commercialization, the market plays an increasingly important role in establishing links to a wider economy, since most agricultural input (fertilizers, seeds, farming equipment) are purchased and most output (livestock, agricultural products) are sold. Thus, agricultural production shifts from subsistence to cash crop farming which is increasingly aimed at export markets. These changes are compounded by the liberalization of trade and the freer movement of capital.

13. Changes in the agricultural sector of developing countries have been accompanied by a wide variety of activities, ranging from the creation of rural industries to the establishment of export processing zones. In the process of rural industrialization, independent entrepreneurs cater for local and international markets and act as subcontractors to larger domestic and foreign firms, thus further intensifying market integration.

14. The ongoing changes have had a mixed impact on regions, countries, households and individuals. New opportunities presented by the process of globalization have benefited some and intensified the social exclusion and marginalization of others. The gender impact has been particularly apparent. It is important to understand that impact and how to maximize the benefits and minimize the adverse effects of change upon women.

15. The lack of comprehensive data and information constrains an analysis of the differentiated impact of the process of globalization on rural populations. The complex nature of the phenomenon of globalization adds to the difficulty.

16. Participants in the expert group meeting on the situation of rural women in the context of globalization agreed on the following principles in addressing the issue:

(a) Globalization is a process which impacts differently on women and men;

(b) The impact of globalization should be considered in terms of:

(i) Short and long-term gains and losses for women and men;

(ii) The increase in choices, opportunities and risks that women may encounter;

(iii) The effect of the increased participation of women in paid employment on the traditional and reproductive responsibilities of women, and on their empowerment;

(iv) Existing local contexts, gender relations, class and ethnic divisions and regional disparities.

17. They also identified two factors that determine how women are affected by change, namely, the role that women play in traditional and/or subsistence production and the extent to which they are able to take advantage of the new, diversifying activities.

18. They further took note of the existing conditions for women with regard to skills, access to resources, household structure, gender division of labour and their role in decision-making processes, and examined the effect of globalization on all of those factors. The present report provides an analysis of the interplay among these factors.

19. The present report also discusses the diversification of livelihoods, how livelihoods are changing in the wake of globalization, and the effects on the situation of women in terms of their access to resources, income-earning opportunities and working conditions. It also examines the changing patterns of labour mobility, analyses how such change affects the opportunities available to women, and focuses on changes in household structure, household division of labour, gender relations and decision-making processes.

III. Diversification of livelihoods

20. For the majority of rural households in developing countries, market integration has given way to adaptive patterns whereby households have diversified their sources of livelihood, either as a strategy for survival or for accumulation. Most rural households are not able to support themselves exclusively by land-based activities and therefore seek additional income from various sources. The strategy a household can adopt depends upon, among other factors, access to productive resources such as land, capital, education and skills. Households may allocate

their labour force between farm and non-farm sectors and between wage and non-wage labour.

21. Under market conditions, the main obstacle encountered by rural households is the availability of cash. Households that have diverse sources of livelihood and predictable and regular cash earnings are able to achieve the highest level of security. Farmers who are relatively better off are maximizing their cash earnings by venturing into non-farm activities, such as operating a small grocery store, restaurant or café in the village or nearly town centre, or taking up a regular job in the private or public sector. Supplementing land-based earnings with a stable and regular non-farm income enables such households to maximize their survival and creates the possibility of savings and, for some, the accumulation of capital. The availability of cash allows these households to hire wage labour, thus freeing the women and children from having to seek work outside the home. The most vulnerable households, at the lower end of the social strata, must rely exclusively on the labour of the entire family, that is, of men, women and children, for their survival.[8]

22. Household livelihoods and the situation of rural women in the context of globalization therefore vary in accordance with access to resources and employment opportunities.

A. Access to resources and benefits

23. Despite the trend towards the diversification of livelihoods, most households in rural areas still depend upon land and natural resources for their basic subsistence. Rights of control over land are important, since they determine access to other resources and benefits, such as extension services, credit and membership in farmers' organizations. In some countries, rural women continue to be deprived by law of equal rights to land. In other countries, although they may have de jure rights, they do not have de facto rights.

24. In some cases, customary rights to land and other natural resources have enabled women to engage in and benefit from agricultural and forest-based production. However, while the privatization process has accelerated the process of land titling, land consolidation and reorganization of the use of common property it has also, notwithstanding some exceptions, increasingly undermined property rights, thus depriving women of direct access to land. Privatization tends to concentrate in the hands of male household heads or the local elite property rights (such as access, use and control) which had previously been distributed within the household and the community.

25. Communal land and forests are decreasing in many countries owing to pressure from commercial logging, population growth and the expansion of commercial agriculture. The increased scarcity and degradation of land, water and common property resources are affecting the productivity and economic viability of women's work, both in farm and non-farm activities which are often the only source of income. It also adds to the domestic workload in terms of time and energy spent on collecting wood for fuel, water and other resources that are no longer easily available.

26. Rural women are closely associated with local ecological resources and manage biodiversity on a daily basis. A renewed commercial interest in biodiversity and indigenous plants and materials has created opportunities for rural women to utilize their traditional knowledge and experience and to take advantage of emerging national and global markets. Large-scale commercial enterprises have, however, a tendency to assume the commercial rights to biogenetic resources. Women may not be able to utilize potential opportunities unless the trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights are implemented in a transparent and just manner so as to protect the rights of local communities to indigenous resources.

27. Another important issue is the possible effect of the increased privatization of agricultural extension services and financial markets on rural women. The access of rural women to agricultural support systems has traditionally been limited, not only because extension workers generally worked with male heads of household but also because time constraints and unequal distribution of domestic work prevent women from participating in such programmes. The privatization of agricultural extension services will further adversely affect the prospects of women's access to them.

28. Provision of microfinance is a popular measure to support the access of rural women to income-generating activities. The impact of microfinance initiatives for rural women is, in general, positive. With ongoing trade liberalization and financial market

integration, however, it is important not only to provide microfinance to rural women in a sustainable manner but also to provide appropriate training in managerial skills and financial and marketing operations. In addition, it should be recognized that microfinance should be seen only as an entry point for the economic advancement of rural women. The long-term focus should be on upgrading the income-generating activities of rural women in order to ensure their competitiveness under existing market conditions.

B. New employment opportunities and working conditions

29. Commercialization of agriculture, together with trade liberalization, especially in developing countries, has created new employment opportunities for women in rural areas, which are also accompanied by new risks. For instance, export crop expansion may force women from permanent agricultural employment into seasonal employment. In Thailand, for example, women have started to subcontract to multinational corporations on family-owned plots to produce baby corn and asparagus on former paddy land or have started to raise shrimps under contract to foreign companies. Often, such employment arrangements in the agricultural export sector entail low paying, labour-intensive, manual jobs. Despite low wages, however, the net returns from such activities may be an improvement over the traditional agricultural activities that they are replacing. Such is the case in Thailand, where women now earn more in a shorter workday than they did by cultivating rice.

30. Globalization is affecting the livelihood prospects of rural women not only through its effects on agriculture but also its effects on industry. Trade liberalization, coupled with the free movement of capital, has enabled many developing countries to set up export industries using cheap labour. This has opened up employment opportunities for women, especially in the garment and electronic sectors. In many countries in South and South-East Asia, women are moving in large numbers from rural to urban areas in order to utilize these opportunities, resulting in a distinct feminization of the labour force in export-oriented industries.

31. Previously, many of these women did not have any job prospects at all. The most they could aspire to was life as a maid, prostitute or petty trader. For them, the prospect of employment in export industries has meant an improvement in their livelihood opportunities, with far-reaching economic and social consequences.[9]

32. Livestock production in developing countries is also undergoing a major transformation owing to global demand, in particular from developed countries, for a variety of livestock products. This demand is diversifying livestock production and is leading to the creation of new industries around livestock products, similar to what is happening in the agricultural sector. While the changes in the organization of livestock production may favour male labour, female labour appears to be preferred for the labour-intensive tasks involved in the processing and production of livestock products.

33. While new technologies for agricultural production are opening up rural industries and agribusiness, new employment opportunities are being created. Such opportunities may, however, favour those who have certain skills, capacities and access to social networks and assets. This may pose a danger for women unless they are provided with education and training to acquire the necessary skills. This phenomenon is evident in certain export industries, where employers prefer young women who have some education over older women who often do not. This problem becomes acute when the nature of specialization shifts from relatively unskilled activities to skill-intensive activities.

34. In addition, withdrawal of state provisions for basic services often increases the burden of reproductive work on women, thereby restricting their ability to take advantage of opportunities in productive, paid employment.

35. In general, rural women work long hours under difficult circumstances, often without proper technologies to ease their productive and reproductive work. The wage levels continue to be lower for women than for men. In some organized sectors, the new jobs entail low wages and poor working conditions, and the unorganized agricultural and informal sectors are totally outside the sphere of formal labour laws. In addition, new working arrangements have also been introduced to increase the competitiveness of agribusiness, rural industry, firms in export-processing zones and contract farming. Such arrangements may involve complex contractual arrangements which are

not self-evident to the poorly informed new employees who have little or no formal education.

36. Nevertheless, women in rural areas, and especially those who live in extreme economic deprivation, seem to prefer the option of having access to income, irrespective of the terms. In this connection, domestic work, in the cities or abroad, has long been a major source of employment for the poor women of rural areas. For instance, many Filipinas migrate to become nannies or housekeepers. The intensification of trade in services over the past two decades has increased and broadened the scope for such work for women in many parts of the developing world.

37. By and large, the benefits accruing to rural women and men through the new economic opportunities brought about by globalization differ owing to prevailing gender norms and inequalities. Men appear to be reluctant to assume work traditionally associated with women (in particular child-rearing responsibilities) unless there is an increase in status or the work is well paid. Women may be reluctant to assume work traditionally associated with men, but may do so out of need.

IV. Changing patterns of labour mobility

38. With the ongoing process of impoverishment in rural areas owing to land scarcity, a loss of its productive and monetary value and the continuous demand for cheap labour in newly emerging industries, there has been an increase in labour mobility and migration. In this context, there is a trend towards the feminization of migration as women are becoming the preferred workers for lowly paid, casual jobs and easily displaced when their labour is no longer needed. These movements take place mainly from one rural area to another, as young women join the agribusiness workforce; from rural to urban areas, where girls and adult women leave for towns and cities to enter the service and manufacturing sectors, including the export processing zones; and from regions to the international arena, to work as nannies, maids, factory workers, entertainers, or teachers and nurses. In most cases, labour movements are voluntary, and can be either temporary, cyclical or permanent. There has, however, also been a rise in forced migration, such as trafficking in women and girls for sex work, domestic service or sweatshop employment (see A/55/322).

39. There are many actors involved in the migration process. States, private enterprises and market forces influence the structuring and channelling of migratory flows. At the household level, the whole family may be involved in deciding which family member should migrate. At times, middlemen or agencies play a central role in organizing the migration of rural people, with a possible risk of exploitation, in particular of women and girls.

40. Although in general migration results in the redistribution of tasks and responsibilities among those left behind, there appears to be a strong difference in the impact of migration on the division of labour within the household and gender relations, depending on whether it is a woman or a man who is migrating.

A. Situation of women left behind

41. One of the consequences of the increasing migration of male members of the household is the increased workload for women who must take on additional tasks and responsibilities. The impact of the additional workload on women is strongly felt, in particular in areas in which social support systems and services are weak or have been eroded. Children, in particular girls, are often called upon to assume some of the domestic tasks, thereby compromising their own education.

42. Women employ different strategies to compensate for the loss of male labour. They may organize labour exchange groups with other women, work longer hours themselves or, if they have the means from remittance and other income sources, hire additional labour. They might also adopt such strategies as reducing the area under cultivation or switching to less labour-intensive but also less nutritious crops. In spite of the increasing burden placed upon women, such situations may have empowering effects since they are afforded the opportunity to acquire new skills and capacities.

43. In societies in which, in the absence of the husband, the woman has to move in with her husband's relatives or patriarchal control is passed on to other male relatives, she cannot achieve control of household resources and is thus adversely affected by her husband's migration.

B. When women leave

44. Apart from economic reasons which are of primary importance, women, in particular young single women, tend to migrate in order to escape the hardship of rural life and patriarchal and social control.

45. Women tend to migrate using a network that assists them in finding a job and which serves as a safety net in times of emergencies. Such a network can, however, also weaken their ability to utilize the opportunities that the migratory process affords, such as being exposed and becoming accustomed to new values, roles and market demands. Those women who do manage to develop new skills often decide to build an independent life rather than resume their former roles in the household.

46. With increased demand for cheap female labour and aggressive job advertising on the part of prospective employers, rural women who are relatively isolated from the outside world can be faced with the risks of trafficking and HIV/AIDS.

C. Migrants who return

47. Men and women migrants often have to renegotiate their position within the relationship, household and community upon their return. Men tend to resume their decision-making position in the household more easily than women. On the other hand, long-term migrants often do not wish to resume their traditional work and prefer to engage in activities that earn a better income or bring higher status. The implication for households is that women continue to fulfil these tasks. For example, in western Sudan, returning male migrants prefer to engage in trade rather than resume agricultural work in order to maintain their income.

48. When women migrants return, they are in general less likely to fit into their former roles and tend to abandon more easily local traditions, supposedly because their nature is more restrictive for women than for men. They are also more inclined to challenge the established gender roles and prevailing customs in the family. This may create strong conflicts, leading to women migrating once again.

49. The pressure to leave again tends to be strong when the money sent home by a female migrant has been used in a way other than she anticipated (e.g., spent rather than saved or invested). This leaves her with neither savings nor an economic base for the future. This, for single women, can diminish their prospects of getting married, and for women with economic dependants, could mean going back to the starting point.

D. Remittances

50. In general, migration increases remittances to rural areas and strengthens linkages between rural and urban areas. In addition, remittances from migrants improve the quality of life in rural households, although their long-term impact and importance in sustaining rural life differ. A distinction can be made between remittances that are used for household welfare and remittances used for investment purposes.

51. The impact of remittances on household well-being depends very much upon who in the household controls the income. Income controlled by women tends to be invested in the well-being of the household and its members, rather than spent on conspicuous consumer items. Men tend to buy such consumer items as radios, bicycles and cars, even in instances when their income may be needed for household survival.

52. Remittances sent by men tend to arrive less regularly than those sent by women, and men take a larger share of their earnings for their own personal use (e.g., for alcohol, a second wife, cigarettes), whereas women are more likely to invest in production input (e.g., cattle, payment of debts, fertilizers etc.). Remittances sent by daughters tend to arrive on a more regular basis, in particular transfers from woman to woman, although research has shown that, in some cases, young and unmarried women tend to keep a larger portion of their income for themselves.

V. Household dynamics

53. With increased market integration, most rural households cannot survive exclusively on traditional farming and have to diversify their sources of income. Therefore, globalization is accompanied by an emerging diversity of household types and changes in the division of labour and decision-making relations within the household.

A. Changes in the structure of rural households

54. An increasing number of households are headed by women and consist of several generations. Although the household members are often spatially split as a result of migration (multi-spatial households), close linkages are maintained.

55. The structure of multi-generational households varies. Apart from the typical extended family set-up, multi-generational households may include additional kin or may have a missing middle generation owing to migration or to HIV/AIDS-related death, in particular in Africa. This results in a growing number of households in which grandmothers, single mothers or even children are looking after extended households which also include non-family members.

56. Households headed by women need to be recognized as a separate category which includes single-person households and households of two or three generations. Where men are away on temporary and seasonal migration, women may be head of the household on a temporary basis. In these households, men may continue to hold the decision-making power. In households in which the woman is not married, is widowed or divorced, has been abandoned, or her husband has been killed or has disappeared in times of conflict, long-term changes may occur in the household structure and women have the decision-making power and the responsibility for its members.

B. Changing patterns of household division of labour

57. As discussed above, one effect of globalization is a sharp increase in the diversification of the different types of work in which household members may engage. This, as well as changes in household structure, is altering the division of labour within households.

58. The opening up of new opportunities, such as wage labour, high-value crop production or income-generating activities, can increase economic returns but will also increase the demand for labour. The majority of rural households respond by restructuring their household division of labour, whereby women and children may be disproportionately burdened. Child labour for poor rural households is particularly important for achieving livelihood security. Children, in many instances escaping the social and legal constraints that restrict the work options for adult women and men, are able to go almost anywhere and do any type of work, such as work as a porter, shoe shiner, street vendor and the like.

59. Women's labour is particularly indispensable and often irreplaceable in rural areas. While men may be able to shift their work performance in accordance with the available work opportunities, women do not have the same flexibility. Productive labour of rural women includes non-remunerated family labour (unpaid family work) and paid labour (wage labour and piece work). In household production, rural women's work is characterized as multi-tasking and labour intensive as they shoulder the responsibility for productive and reproductive tasks. Yet, policy makers do not adequately recognize the contribution of women and children to rural economies. Although there has been some progress made in including women's unpaid work in official statistics, in most countries this issue is not on the agenda.

C. Impact of change on gender relations and decision-making

60. The influence of women on the decision-making process in the household and the community is a reflection of customs and cultures and of power relations. These relations are deeply embedded in society and are resistant to change. Globalization, which includes the development of new information technologies, is, however, having a major impact on traditional decision-making patterns. The increasing involvement of women in non-traditional activities and paid employment and changes in household structures have brought about renegotiations of gender relations, with the outcome dependent upon individual choices, the sociocultural context and economic factors. This may result in the greater access of women to decision-making power but also an increased risk of their being subjected to domestic violence.

61. In many countries, the most visible changes in gender relations relate to marriage. As rural women adjust to economic change and earn an independent income and gain access to new ideas or lifestyles, the factors influencing their choice of a partner tend to alter. For example, a woman may place more emphasis on personal characteristics than on economic prospects

and cultural expectations. Throughout the world, there are growing numbers of women choosing to delay marriage or remain single while still choosing to have children. There are communities in which migrant unmarried women returning home are looked at as particularly desirable marriage partners owing to their economic independence, skills and abilities. There are, however, also communities in which these gains are perceived as a threat, making it more difficult for the women to marry and adjust to the community.

62. The greater the degree of exposure of rural women to cultural and social change in the rest of the world, including human rights instruments, and the stronger their economic position and influence in the household and community, the more likely it is that change will also shape and reinforce their independent decision-making roles and influence gender relations.

63. The process of globalization, with the expanding role of the private sector and increasing decentralization in decision-making, has also created opportunities for the broader participation of women in local governance.

VI. Conclusions and recommendations

64. The participants in the expert group meeting agreed that, in the context of globalization, rural women encounter new opportunities as well as additional negative circumstances and limitations.

65. Globalization has been associated with increased feminization of the labour force, as the female share of employment has grown throughout the world. Much of the increase in rural areas has resulted from a movement of female labour from the subsistence sector to the paid economy.

66. The ongoing changes have the potential to expand employment and income opportunities for rural women, thus increasing their autonomy, self-esteem, choices and decision-making power within and outside the household. Such a process is contributing to a weakening of traditional gender values of society and promoting gender equality.

67. Increased employment of women has, however, often been associated with poor working conditions, low pay, lack of work-related benefits and, often, short-term employment. In addition, the increased participation of women in the paid workforce has not diminished the unequal distribution of domestic responsibilities. Such factors continue to support existing gender inequalities.[10]

68. Since economic integration entails shifts in the nature of economic specialization, some activities will inevitably contract as others expand. This implies that, within the rural sector, some will find their livelihood prospects threatened even as overall opportunities expand. In this sense, the effects of globalization are bound to be uneven across different population groups in a given country. Thus, the benefits accruing to women and men would differ owing to the constraints posed by their differential access to resources and by gender norms that shape their willingness and capacity to take advantage of new opportunities.

69. Rural women can be more adversely affected by changing economic circumstances because they are at a disadvantage, compared to men, in terms of education, training, domestic responsibilities, lack of access to information and isolation from social networks. The long-term prospects for women depend not only on their assets and abilities but also on the existing norms impinging on the social division of labour. To the extent that women have inferior endowments and that laws, policies and sociocultural norms discriminate against them, their long-term prospects will be inferior to those of men.

70. In considering long-term prospects, it is important to bear in mind that sociocultural norms are in a constant process of transformation, partly as a response to economic forces. It is therefore important to consider how the economic forces unleashed by globalization, in combination with the diffusion of foreign values and norms, interact with the existing domestic norms. In particular, it is necessary to identify where and how these forces are changing existing norms and where they are reinforcing them.

71. The participants in the meeting agreed that, in order to reduce the vulnerability of rural women in the short term, there is a need to develop an appropriate support system to assist them in their survival strategies. In the long term, in order to achieve and sustain the benefits that might be associated with globalization, it is necessary to design interventions that will improve the skills and capacities of women in order to secure their livelihoods in a more competitive environment. Moreover, it is necessary to devise

measures aimed at changing the existing norms that shape the gender division of labour.

72. In addition, it is important to create an enabling policy environment for improving the situation of rural women, which would include the design and implementation of a gender-sensitive macroeconomic policy framework and social support systems which would accommodate women's productive and reproductive roles and encourage a more equal gender division of labour in the household.

73. The recommendations below are proposed in an effort to ensure that women benefit from the opportunities of globalization and that its adverse effects are minimized. The implementation of these recommendations at all levels should be based on the needs and priorities of women, as identified by participatory rural processes, and should focus on the following areas: human rights and labour standards; women's livelihoods and work; empowerment and capacity-building through access to training, technology and basic services; migration and gender relations; and further research and policy formulation.

A. Human rights and labour standards

74. The views of women should be taken into account by Governments and parliaments in the formulation of new laws and regulations, and in changing existing laws which contravene the principle of equality between women and men. Practical measures for the implementation of international instruments should be promoted.

75. All relevant human rights instruments should be fully applied to rural women by Governments. Particular attention should be given by States parties to the implementation of article 14 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

76. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women should develop a general recommendation on article 14 of the Convention and specifically request the reporting States parties to pay attention to the situation of rural women in the context of globalization.

77. The equal right of women to property and inheritance should be fully and unconditionally recognized and implemented. Compliance with international standards of equality, including women's property rights, should be protected and promoted by Governments. Governments should undertake every effort to support the implementation of Commission on Human Rights resolutions 2000/13 and 2001/34, on the right of women to equal ownership of, access to and control over land and other property, and equal access to adequate housing.

78. Governments, international organizations, including those of the United Nations system, and non-governmental organizations should, as a matter of priority, promote awareness of the legal property rights of rural women through the: (a) dissemination of national and international legal instruments; (b) provision of literacy training for rural women; (c) provision of legal assistance; (d) raising awareness of current discrimination; and (e) provision of gender-sensitive training for implementers.

79. The International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions and international standards of gender equality and human rights should be incorporated into national law and the codes of conduct of transnational corporations. Their observance should be monitored by Governments, relevant international organizations (e.g., ILO), trade unions, non-governmental organizations and other actors in civil society.

80. Training programmes and discussions aimed at both rural women and men to promote gender awareness should be organized by national and local governments, human rights groups and other non-governmental organizations in order to encourage the sharing of parental roles and domestic duties by men.

81. Governments should eliminate de jure and/or de facto job discrimination against rural migrants and abolish all discriminatory regulations affecting the living and working opportunities of rural migrants in urban areas, where appropriate.

82. Governments and human rights and women's groups should provide information to rural migrant women on their human rights and international standards of equality. Governments should also provide these women with legal and consular support, as appropriate.

B. Women's livelihoods and work

83. Governments, the private sector and civil society should jointly develop policies and projects and consolidate resources in order to improve infrastructure and provide job opportunities in rural areas.

84. The functioning of financial institutions in rural areas should be analysed by Governments and local authorities, with a view to making them more accessible to rural women. This should include the provision of support to revolving credit systems which are well suited to assisting cooperative ventures in rural areas.

85. Governments, donors, non-governmental organizations and the private sector should develop specific assistance programmes and advisory services for the development of the economic skills of rural women in banking, modern trading and financial procedures, matching the requirements of the market economy.

86. Governments, through appropriate policy regulations, should protect national resources and biodiversity and should invest in eco- and cultural tourism in rural areas so as to enable rural women to develop new economic activities.

87. The indigenous knowledge of rural women and their experience in subsistence production and environmental management should be recognized by national and local governments and development experts as a resource, and should be integrated into formal programmes.

88. Support for rural women by Governments, non-governmental organizations and the private sector should not be confined to microenterprises. Rather, it should be directed at different scales of enterprise and women should be supported to expand their enterprises according to their needs and the possibilities available in the given environment.

89. In order to enhance the participation of women in the labour market, improve their bargaining power and facilitate social contacts, Governments, non-governmental organizations and the private sector should support initiatives aimed at strengthening social networks, which are a source of support and information.

C. Empowerment and capacity-building through access to training, technology and basic services

90. Governments, non-governmental organizations, the mass media and other actors in civil society should organize educational and awareness-raising campaigns aimed at the transformation of cultural norms towards gender equality and encourage the private and public sectors to be more gender-sensitive.

91. Education, information and training for rural women should continue to be assigned high priority. Information services for rural women entrepreneurs should be expanded, based on an analysis of rapidly changing and new market opportunities.

92. Agricultural training programmes and educational institutions should revise their curricula and methods of work in order to respond to the needs of rural women in a rapidly changing global context. They should also provide rural women with information on emerging job opportunities.

93. Governments and local authorities should develop exchange programmes at the school level for rural and urban girls so as to familiarize them with the living conditions in each sphere and introduce them to the opportunities in each area.

94. Governments, international organizations, including those of the United Nations system, educational institutions and non-governmental organizations should create opportunities for rural women from various regions and countries to exchange experience and information, to network and to engage in mutually beneficial projects.

95. Rural women should be more actively supported by Governments and the private sector in gaining access to the opportunities provided by new agricultural and information and communication technologies. Such facilities must be made available at the level of rural villages.

96. Governments should ensure the provision of basic services in education and health, including maternal and childcare services, and devise them in accordance with the needs of rural women and girls, including by means of distance and informal education programmes. The private sector should support such activities.

97. Governments and the private sector should provide support for community initiatives for the care

of abandoned or orphaned children and other vulnerable members of the community.

98. In order to improve the negotiating positions and skills of rural women in the household and community and to strengthen their self-esteem, self-confidence and awareness of their rights, national and local governments, international organizations and non-governmental organizations should provide training to rural women in capacity-building.

99. Governments, political parties, local authorities and non-governmental organizations should:

(a) Facilitate the participation of women in decision-making bodies at the local level by providing training and capacity-building programmes. Affirmative action programmes, including quotas or targets, might be introduced as interim measures, as appropriate;

(b) Support and encourage the equal participation of rural women in the leadership of rural producer associations.

D. Migration and gender relations

100. Non-governmental organizations should organize training programmes for women who must assume greater responsibilities in the absence of male members of the household, in order to support them in the performance of all tasks related to the new work requirements.

101. Governments, in cooperation with the International Organization for Migration, should promote the establishment of training programmes, services and community centres for migrant rural women in order to upgrade their skills and provide them with information on existing laws, customs and cultural traditions in the receiving countries.

102. Governments, financial institutions and non-governmental organizations should provide rural communities and migrant women with information on modern ways of financial management, banking and investment opportunities so as to enable them to achieve the best returns for their remittances and savings.

103. Donors should provide financial support to non-governmental organizations involved in providing direct counselling to female migrants from rural areas.

104. In view of increased trafficking in women and children, Governments, international organizations and national and international law enforcement agencies should provide effective protection to rural women migrants and their children and inform them of their rights.

E. Further research and policy formulation

105. Governments, international organizations, including those of the United Nations system, and research institutes should compile data on and analyse the impact of globalization on rural communities from a gender perspective. The data and information should be disaggregated by region and sex and made context-specific in order to reflect rural women's work, including that in the informal sector. It should be followed by further empirical research and case studies in various economic and sociocultural contexts, in order to assess the specific challenges for, and opportunities available to, rural women.

106. Governments and international organizations, including those of the United Nations system, should intensify their efforts to reflect women's unpaid work in rural households in national statistics and in policy formulation, implementation and monitoring.

107. The changing nature of households and gender relations in rural areas in the current global context should be studied by research institutes so as to enable Governments and international organizations to adjust policies and programmes in order to respond to rural women's needs.

108. The International Organization for Migration and international and national research institutes should be encouraged to conduct comparative long-term research in order to document the diverse patterns of migration and their impact on gender relations and gender identities throughout the migration cycle.

109. Special studies should be undertaken by Governments, research institutes and the private sector to establish the best model for integrating rural women in the field of information and communication technology, in particular in connection with the preparation of the World Summit on the Information Society.[11]

110. In order to implement the findings of the expert group meeting in a coherent manner and coordinate the efforts of various actors towards the improvement of the situation of rural women, a high-level policy consultation should be convened at the United Nations to set priorities and outline critical strategies that would meet the needs and aspirations of rural women in the context of globalization.

111. The Commission on the Status of Women may wish to pay attention to the situation of rural women in the context of its deliberations on the priority themes included in its multi-year programme of work.

112. The agencies and programmes of the United Nations system dealing with issues of development should address the specific needs of rural women in the context of globalization and design the means for their empowerment. They should also ensure that a gender perspective is consistently incorporated into their policies and programmes.

Notes

[1] *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II.

[2] *Report of the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, Nairobi, 15-26 July 1985* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.85.IV.10), chap. I, sect. A.

[3] *Report of the Fourth World Conference* ..., annex I.

[4] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2000, Supplement No. 3* (E/2000/23), chap. II, sect. A.

[5] See ibid., *2001, Supplement No. 3* (E/2001/23), chap. II, sect. A. To be issued.

[6] See sect. II.A of E/CN.4/1998/2-E/CN.4/Sub.2/1997/50, E/CN.4/1999/4-E/CN.4/Sub.2/1998/45 and E/CN.4/2000/2-E/CN.4/Sub.2/1999/54, respectively.

[7] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1998, Supplement No. 7* (E/1998/27), chap. I, sect. D.

[8] Children of all ages are a significant component of household survival strategies. They perform various tasks in connection with domestic work and household production, and generate cash income through employment, primarily in the informal sector.

[9] See, for example, Z. Tzannatos, "Growth, adjustment and the labour market: effects on women workers" (paper presented at the Fourth Conference of the International Association for Feminist Economics, Tours, France, 5-7 July 1995).

[10] See *1999 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development: Globalization, Gender and Work* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.99.IV.8), chap. VI, sect. B.

[11] The Council of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) decided, on 28 July 2001, to proceed with the preparation of the World Summit, which will be convened in 2003 under the auspices of ITU, in close cooperation with other interested organizations of the United Nations system.